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ACTIVE SENIORS: THE POTENTIAL  
OF A “SUPER-AGED” SOCIETY

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**A**s Japan is rapidly aging, a growing proportion of “older people” are remaining active in the workforce and other sectors of society. Through interviews with such active seniors, we look at the possibilities for the new age of longevity in which people can expect to work and play long into their healthy lives.

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**ON THE COVER**

Nishimoto Kimiko uses photo editing software to process her own photographs.

Photo: Courtesy of Nishimoto Kimiko

**EDITORS' NOTE**

Japanese names in this publication are written in Japanese order: family name first, personal name last.

## JAPAN-U.S. SUMMIT TELEPHONE TALK



Prime Minister Suga at a press conference after the Japan-U.S. Summit Telephone Talk, January 28, 2021



Joseph R. Biden at a press conference during his visit to Japan on December 3, 2013

ON January 28, 2021, Suga Yoshihide, Prime Minister of Japan, held a summit telephone talk with the Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr., President of the United States of America. The overview of the talk is as follows.

At the outset, Prime Minister Suga offered his congratulations to President Biden on his inauguration and the start of his administration, to which President Biden expressed his gratitude.

The two leaders agreed to work closely together in order to further strengthen the Japan-U.S. Alliance. President Biden also expressed his unwavering commitment to the defense of Japan, including the application of Article 5 of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty to the Senkaku Islands, and reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to provide extended deterrence to Japan.

The two leaders shared the view on the importance of strengthening the U.S. presence in the Indo-Pacific region. They also affirmed that they would work side-by-side to address regional challenges and to realize a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

President Biden voiced his high regard for Japan's contribution to the U.S.-Japan-Australia-India rela-

tionship, and agreed that it would be further promoted going forward.

The two leaders agreed that Japan and the U.S. would work closely together to achieve the denuclearization of North Korea in accordance with the U.N. Security Council resolutions. Prime Minister Suga also asked for understanding and cooperation toward the early resolution of the abductions issue, to which President Biden offered his support.

Prime Minister Suga welcomed the U.S. decision to rejoin to the Paris Agreement, the reversal of its notice of withdrawal from the WHO, and the announcement of join COVAX Facility. Furthermore, the two leaders affirmed that Japan and the U.S. would continue their collaboration on the shared challenges that the international community faces, such as climate change, measures to combat COVID-19, and innovation. President Biden also extended an invitation to Prime Minister Suga to attend the Leaders' Climate Summit.

The two leaders agreed to coordinate on an appropriate time for a visit by Prime Minister Suga to the U.S., aiming for an early date while taking into account the COVID-19 situation.



# ACTIVE SENIORS: THE POTENTIAL OF A “SUPER-AGED” SOCIETY

In 1950, the average life expectancy in Japan was slightly less than 60 years. In 2019, it was approximately 84 years, and presently more than 28% of the population is older than 65. This high aging rate makes Japan a “super-aged” society. However, as stated in the Japanese government’s “Guideline of Measures of Ageing Society” (2018), “The general trend of determining over 65 as ‘older people’ by their age is no longer realistic.” Many “older people” remain or wish to remain active in the workforce and other sectors of society well past the traditional retirement age. Through interviews with such active seniors, we look at the possibilities for the new age of longevity in Japan in which people can expect to utilize their talents and follow their interests long into their healthy lives.

Photos: Courtesy of Jitsukawa Yoshinobu; Courtesy of Miyagawa Maiko; Courtesy of Hiruma Eiko; Courtesy of Takino Fumie; Courtesy of TOKYO-SPORTS; Courtesy of Joe Okada

# New Possibilities for an Aging Society



Akiyama Hiroko, visiting professor at the University of Tokyo's Institute of Gerontology

As Japan is rapidly aging, a growing number of “older people” remain active in the workforce and other sectors of society. We spoke about the possibilities for an aging society with Akiyama Hiroko, a visiting professor at the University of Tokyo's Institute of Gerontology.

**In 2018, by Cabinet decision, the Japanese government approved the “Guideline of Measures for Ageing Society.” The Guideline states that “The general trend of determining over 65 as ‘Older**

**People’ by their age is no longer realistic.” What is the current status of Japan’s aging society?**

In 1950, the average life expectancy in Japan was slightly less than 60 years. In 2019, it was approximately 84 years. Moreover, approximately 5% of the population was 65 and over in 1950, while approximately 28% of the population was that age in 2019. As a result, more older people are becoming ill or are in need of nursing care. However, a growing number of people are also maintaining good health and living longer. In 1992 and 2002 the Tokyo Metropolitan Geriatric Medical Center surveyed the normal walking speed of older people, one of the indices used to measure the degree of aging. In that ten-year period, the average normal walking speeds of both men and women increased by the equivalent of 11 years, with the normal walking speed of a 75-year-old person in 2002 being the same as that of a 64-year-old person in 1992.

Compared to the era when life expectancy was about 60, people nowadays can expect to live longer and can make a variety of life plans while they maintain good health. For example, previously, people’s post-retirement lives were short, but now a long second life awaits people after retirement. Accordingly, it is possible for people to embark on second careers completely different from before retirement.

**What initiatives are necessary to enhance older people’s second lives in Japan?**

A major task for Japan, facing a declining birthrate and an aging population, is to extend the “healthy life expectancy” in which people are able to live in health and continue to live independently. One more major task is to develop an environment in which older people are able to live safely and comfortably with a sense of purpose. To solve these issues, the University of Tokyo’s Institute of Gerontology (IOG) is implementing various projects in collaboration with local governments and private companies. One of these projects is to create jobs for older people in and around the Toyoshikidai Housing Complex in Kashiwa City, Chiba Prefecture where there is an increasing number of aging residents. Many Japanese seniors hope to remain active and play some kind of role in society as long as possible. However, many retired people I interviewed say, “I have nothing to do,” or “I don’t know what to do.” Accordingly, the project includes initiatives supporting the employment of older people in areas such as agriculture and childcare, in cooperation with local farmers and businesses. Working in the areas where they live, within a reasonable extent, can help older people find purpose in life and become engaged in society. This has resulted in the maintenance of good physical and mental health and has contributed to solving local issues such as the labor shortage.

In 2016, the government of Japan also began projects around the nation supporting regions where older people are able to work regardless of age by making use of their knowledge and experience (the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare’s projects toward a life-long active working environment in cooperation with the region).

**Tell us about the possibilities for an aging society that draws on older people’s knowledge and experience.**

Japan will have to develop many products and services to meet the needs of older people or solve issues of aging local communities. In other

words, aging societies have the potential for innovation. However, to innovate in ways that meet the diverse needs of older people and local communities, the opinions and ideas of a variety of people are necessary. Accordingly, not only specific companies but local residents, local governments, universities and other organizations need to work together. In 2017, in collaboration with residents, companies and the Kamakura City government, the IOG opened the Kamakura Living Lab in Imaizumidai, a community in the northeast of Kamakura City, Kanagawa Prefecture, with approximately 5,000 residents. Living Lab is a users-centered platform with the goal of creating products, services and social systems that improve daily life. There are more than 400 living labs in Europe. While older people make up approximately half of Imaizumidai’s population, residents are endeavoring to build a community that is livable for young people too. For example, the lab collaborated with a company handling office furniture to create a desk that is well suited to teleworking. Released on the market in 2019, the desk has been praised by purchasers for its easy-to-use features. In fact, Kamakura Living Lab is a joint research program with a living lab in Sweden. When the King and Queen of Sweden visited Japan in 2018, Their Majesties visited Imaizumidai with Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado. I was honored to show our Living Lab to Their Majesties on that occasion.

Initiatives in Japan, which is aging ahead of the rest of the world, have become the focus of international attention. Many people from countries in Asia, Europe and North America have come to inspect the IOG, Toyoshikidai and Imaizumidai. I believe that the innovation generated based on the wealth of knowledge and experience possessed by older people in Japan will contribute greatly to the world. ▮

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Interview by SAWAJI OSAMU

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# Sharing the Joy of Photography



Nishimoto Kimiko uses photo editing software to process her own photographs.



**Nishimoto Kimiko began taking pictures at the age of 72. She is still an active photographer, and has more than 230,000 Instagram followers. Her humorous selfies are especially popular.**

## FUJITA MAO

**N**ISHIMOTO Kimiko (92), a photographer living in Kumamoto City, Kumamoto Prefecture, publishes selfies that would make anyone instantly burst into laughter. Nishimoto began taking photos when she was 72 years old. Having started out as a beautician at the age of 18, switching to become a professional cycle racer at 22, she gave up her career when she married five years later, and went on to raise three children. Nishimoto first picked up a single-lens reflex camera when she was asked by a friend to attend a photography class taught by Nishimoto’s photographer son, Kazutami.

“At first, I didn’t know anything about photography—I only joined the class to make new friends. But I came to see the merit in the fact that photos can be preserved, and as I continued to attend the weekly classes, I started to enjoy taking photographs,” says Nishimoto.

All photos: Courtesy of Nishimoto Kimiko

The photography classes are held in seven locations across Japan, including Kumamoto, Tokyo and Osaka, so she has made friends of all ages from all over the country as she had hoped. Sometimes Nishimoto goes out with her friends to take pictures, while other times her friends stay over at her house, where she lives alone, to enjoy photo sessions.

Nishimoto's photographs are all the product of her own ideas in terms of composition, clothing and props. Using things found in everyday life that inspire her, she continues to create a new view of the world that generates laughter in those who look at her photographs. Sometimes, for example, she includes her own reflection in photographs after setting up her tripod the appropriate distance from her subject. Her selfies are humorous and striking.

"I became interested in taking selfies when I was given a homework assignment in a photography class to take a picture of myself. I knew it would be difficult to take good pictures like the professionals, so I decided to take pictures that the viewer would find amusing."

Having learned to edit digital photos in the photography class, she purchased a computer for the first time in her life at the age of 74 and began to use editing software to process her own pictures.

For example, in the photo of Nishimoto with a walking aid overtaking a car, she photographed herself alongside a stationary car and processed the image to make it appear that both she and the car were moving at speed. The photo in which Nishimoto appears to be floating in the background was created using photo editing software to erase the chair she was sitting on.

At the age of 82, ten years after first picking up a single-lens reflex camera, Nishimoto held her first solo exhibition at a branch of the Kumamoto Prefectural Museum of Art. The digital art inspired by Nishimoto's imagination has been awarded numerous prizes in photography contests in Japan, and a collection of her photographs was published in 2016.

Nishimoto says she'll give anything a try. So when she found out about Instagram, she saw it as just another opportunity. She started posting by herself

in 2018 after learning how to use it in her photography class. As of January 2021, Nishimoto had over 230,000 Instagram followers, her work even attracting attention overseas.

"The reaction to my Instagram posts has been huge, but it hasn't changed my desire to take funny pictures. My life changed when I encountered photography in my 70s. I'm so glad I found photography. Even if I become bedridden, I'll just pick up my camera and photograph something on the ceiling."

At the moment, Nishimoto is in rehabilitation for weakness in her legs and lower back, but she still enjoys taking pictures in her small photography studio she has set up at home. Not all Nishimoto's photos are humorous. The richness of her life is also expressed in her still life works. No matter how old she gets, she is driven by the quest to discover what it is that the subject is communicating to her, expressing through her photographs a world of unknown richness. Nishimoto herself derives great pleasure from this. That pleasure is evident in her photographs. 



# The World's Oldest Practicing Pharmacist

**At a pharmacy in Tokyo, one woman has been working for over 70 years as a pharmacist. In November 2018, Hiruma Eiko was certified as the oldest practicing pharmacist by Guinness World Records.**

**SASAKI TAKASHI**

**H**IRUMA Eiko was born in 1923 in Ikebukuro, Tokyo, and is now 97 years old. 1923 was the year Tokyo was devastated by the Great Kanto earthquake. In that same year, Hiruma's father opened a pharmacy.

Hiruma grew up watching her father work at the pharmacy, and decided to follow the same path. She entered Tokyo Pharmaceutical School for Women (present-day Meiji Pharmaceutical University) at the age of 18. She became a qualified pharmacist in 1944, and began helping her family's pharmacy business in the middle of the Second World War. The war intensified, and two days after she was evacuated from Tokyo to the countryside in March 1945, large parts of Tokyo were destroyed in the "Great Tokyo Air Raid." The family's pharmacy was also destroyed by the fire.

After the war ended that August, Hiruma returned to Tokyo. She felt that she had been given the opportunity to live and decided to continue to work as a pharmacist for as long as she lives. Approximately

All photos: Courtesy of Hiruma Eiko



Working at the pharmacy

three years after the end of the war she resumed her work. She tirelessly stood behind the pharmacy counter from nine in the morning until seven in the evening, Monday through Saturday.

As a pharmacist, Hiruma has always placed an emphasis on customers' feelings. Immediately following the end of the war, all goods were in short supply and the top priority was food and clothing, not medicine. Even when people felt slightly ill, they had more important things to worry about than consulting a doctor. In these circumstances, people needing help visited Hiruma's pharmacy. She treated these customers, sincerely consulting with them as much as possible. She was willing to listen to them, sometimes as another human, not as a pharmacist, about the problems in their lives. She has always made sure to say words that cheer up the customer. This stance did not change, even after Japan's affluence increased during its era of high economic growth.

Hiruma says, "Even now, in this materially affluent

society, there are many people who are physically or mentally ill. My determination to be considerate of customers' feelings has not wavered, now or in the past." Hiruma says the number of people to whom she has offered words of encouragement over her more than 70 years working as a pharmacist must be close to the population of a large city.

Having supported her father and taken over the family business, Hiruma continues to work as a pharmacist now with the support of her family. Her grandson Kojiro, the fourth generation of the family to run the pharmacy, proposed she apply to Guinness World Records to be certified as the oldest practicing pharmacist. She dismissed her grandson's suggestion out of hand, saying, "I am only doing what comes naturally for a pharmacist. Applying for recognition is absurd." However, later she changed her mind, thinking that if she were to be certified by Guinness World Records, it might help more people to understand the role pharmacists play and encourage more people to continue to work into old age.

Kojiro first reached out to Guinness World Records about 10 years ago, when Hiruma was 88 years old. However, the record holder at that time was a 92-year-old pharmacist in South Africa. On November 23, 2018, Hiruma became the Guinness World Record holder at 95 years and 17 days old.

In 2020, Hiruma injured her foot, requiring her to use a wheelchair. Taking a temporary leave from work, she devoted her time to rehabilitation, and became able to move around with walking aids. This spring, she posted on Twitter to say that she would do her best to return to work. The thing that motivated her to work on her rehabilitation was her desire to stand behind the counter as a pharmacist again.

"I am going to do my best and work as a practicing pharmacist until I am 100 years old," Hiruma says with determination.

Being there for everyone who visits the pharmacy is the way Hiruma Eiko lives her life. And now, she means to stand up once again to achieve it. **U**



Hiruma and her family after becoming the Guinness World Record holder



Saitama Gold Theater group photograph (2017)

**A 63-year-old housewife joined a theater company and took to the stage. Since then, she has performed on many stages. Now 78, she is devoting her life to acting.**

### UNO MASAKI

In February 2006, an article appeared in a newspaper calling for people with or without acting experience to join a theater company being started up by Ninagawa Yukio (1935–2016), an eminent theater producer both in Japan and internationally. The theater company was called Saitama Gold Theater, based at Saitama Arts Theatre in Saitama City, Saitama Prefecture, and its members had to be at least 55 years old. The words “You will be trained as professional actors” in the small article caught the eye of Hyakumoto Natsue, now 78. Hyakumoto had been thinking that she did not want to live out her days as a housewife and was looking to find a clear purpose in life. Having a hunch that this was it, she cut the article out and placed it on her dining table. However, she dithered over whether to apply, not confident she would be accepted. Then her husband told her, “If you don’t hurry, you’ll miss out. Why not just try?” So she took the plunge and applied. It was the first step to a new life.

Aged 63 at the time, Hyakumoto was one of the 48 people selected to join the troupe out of 1,200

All photos: Courtesy of Miyagawa Maiko

applicants from Japan and abroad, and her life began to transform.

Every day for a year and a half, she commuted 90 minutes each way from her home in Tokyo to the theater, where she attended training and classroom lectures from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. In the summer of 2007, after two interim performances, the curtain rose on the company’s memorable flagship production entitled *Picnic on a Boat*. The play depicts the hopes and anxieties of life as it unfolds aboard a ship carrying people affected by mass layoffs who are on their way to find reemployment overseas. When the boat picks up a refugee from a foreign land, there is a sudden reversal of events. This was the challenge for the novice actors in their first major theater production.

“I was so nervous it felt like my heart was going to explode. As I performed, I did everything in my power to remember what Ninagawa had taught me,” says Hyakumoto, her words conveying the raw excitement of that time.

Under the strict tutelage of Ninagawa, who demanded performances that exude the rich life experience of senior citizens, Hyakumoto performed on many stages, both in Saitama Gold Theater productions as well as those put on by external theater companies. In 2013, she toured Japan and performed abroad in cities such as Paris, France.

Looking back on rehearsals with Ninagawa, she says, “We weren’t spared just because we were

amateurs. He was constantly hurling angry words at us, such as, ‘Cut it out!’ , or ‘You call yourself actors!’ He never hurled objects at us, though,” laughs Hyakumoto. “Seriously, though, Ninagawa drummed into us the need to become actors who can draw on the joys and sorrows we’ve experienced in our long lives and harness those emotions in our performance,” she says.

Ninagawa passed away in May 2016.

Hyakumoto says it was a shock for everyone, but “we were united in the belief that we had come this far because of our love of acting, and that we should continue in our efforts with Ninagawa’s teachings always at the forefront of our minds.”

Today, the group has 35 members; 10 men and 25 women. All were founding members. Some 15 years after the founding of the company, the average age of its members is 81.4 years, with the oldest a 95-year-old woman.

“Even if members leave for a while due to illness or other reasons, they always come back. Acting is their reason for living. For me, too, my life revolves around the theater company. Using my body has made me healthier than I used to be as well as more assertive in my daily life. Other people often tell me that I’ve changed, that I’m so full of life.”

In the midst of the spread of COVID-19, all performances for 2020 were canceled and the outlook for this year too remains uncertain. Even so, Hyakumoto says she wants to continue acting with Saitama Gold Theater.

“I’ve been thinking about what Ninagawa often used to say: 99% of your daily life is related to your acting. I want to put various experiences from my day-to-day life into the drawers of my mind and use them in my future performances.”

Theater-goers are eagerly anticipating the resumption of performances by Hyakumoto and her fellow senior citizens. They say life is just like a story. We are all protagonists in our own lives. Playing our part, we live our lives and weave our stories. **7**



From top, Scene from *Picnic on a Boat* (2007); Scene from *Wareware no moromoro* (2018); Hyakumoto Natsue



Takino Fumie in rehearsal, Tokyo, 2020

All Photos: Courtesy of Takino Fumie

# Japan Pom Pom Still Going Strong

**Cheerleading as an activity and sport enjoys widespread popularity in Japan, even among senior citizens.**

**SATO KUMIKO**

**C**HEERLEADERS' beaming smiles, brightly colored costumes and energetic performances charm spectators and generate excitement at sports events around the world. Originating in the 1860s as a way for students to encourage their teams at American college football games, cheerleading has evolved to become a sport in its own right and is now practiced in many countries.

There are many cheerleading teams active across Japan including university, high school, community and corporate teams. Among them, one small group of enthusiasts has attracted special attention. Japan Pom Pom was formed in 1996, with membership restricted to those aged 55 years and over. In 2019 the team had twenty-four members, with an average age of 72. While teams for elderly people are not uncommon nowadays, in 1996, when Japan Pom Pom was established, no such group existed in Japan.

Japan Pom Pom was started by Takino Fumie, who was born in 1932 and is now 89 years old. While recent years have seen the

management of the team gradually delegated to the younger members, Takino is still lead representative of Japan Pom Pom and continues to perform in high-tempo routines.

"I don't do cheerleading for the sake of my health or any other particular purpose. All of us do cheerleading just because it's fun and we enjoy it," says Takino.

After graduating from college, Takino got married and had two children. Japanese society at the time expected that women would stay at home and support their husbands and children. Unable to accept this traditional women's role and not wanting to die with regrets, Takino eventually decided at the age of 52 to follow her own path and began to live alone away from her family.

At the age of 53, Takino went overseas to study gerontology, the study of various aspects of aging, at the University of North Texas, where she earned a master's degree. After returning to Japan, she learned through a book sent from the United States that there was a senior cheerleading team over there. Keen to see if she



Japan Pom Pom performing in the USA (United Spirit Association) Nationals; 2010, 2018 and 2019

could do the same in Japan, she approached her friends with the idea and the five of them started up Japan Pom Pom. They continue to hold intensive practice sessions with a professional coach once a week, readying themselves to perform before an audience.

At first, the group enjoyed cheerleading for personal satisfaction. However, the members' attitude to cheerleading began to change when they held a charity show to celebrate their seventh anniversary. After the performance that day, they received many comments from the audience saying that they felt energized and encouraged.

"It made me realize for the first time that this was what cheerleading was all about. The word 'cheer' does indeed mean all those things—cheerfulness, joy and cheering people on," reflects Takino.

Since then, Japan Pom Pom has participated in various competitions as a guest and exchanged with senior teams in the United States, adopting the team motto of "providing dreams, energy and hope."

Says Takino, "I never use my age as an excuse for not starting something new." She now enjoys performing on the ukulele, which she took up at the age of 80.

2020 marked the 25th anni-

versary of the formation of Japan Pom Pom. The team had been practicing for a charity show, but when COVID-19 began to spread the event was canceled, and some members stopped coming to practice. Currently, the number of active members has dropped to sixteen.

Nevertheless, Takino says she is keen to hold another show in 2021 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the team's formation.

Over the years, many people must surely have been "cheered" by Takino. On the occasion of her group's 25th anniversary show, the audience is sure to be cheered again. **U**

# MR. FUJI-SAN

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One man is so captivated by Mount Fuji, Japan's highest mountain, that he has climbed it more than 2,000 times. They call him “Mr. Fuji-san” (Mr. Mount Fuji) and he is 77 years old.

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**SASAKI TAKASHI**

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3 4



All photos: Courtesy of Jitsukawa Yoshinobu

- 1 Jitsukawa Yoshinobu
- 2 Mount Fuji
- 3 Jitsukawa with his wife, Miki
- 4 A rainbow photographed by Jitsukawa from the summit of Mount Fuji

**J**ITSUKAWA Yoshinobu, who will turn 78 in the summer of 2021, has reached the summit of the 3,776-meter Mount Fuji 2,060 times. Jitsukawa lives in the city of Numazu in Shizuoka Prefecture, at the southern base of Mount Fuji. He first climbed to the summit at the age of 42 with his family, and was impressed by the sea of clouds below. It was to be the first of many ascents of Mount Fuji.

Jitsukawa had loved the mountains ever since his childhood, going on to enjoy trekking and camping as a member of his company's mountaineering club. Often, he would be asked by overseas trainees assigned to his company to drive them to the 5th station of Mount Fuji, from where they would climb toward the summit. Over repeated climbs of Mount Fuji, Jitsukawa felt himself increasingly captivated by the mountain. Today, he has stood on the summit of Mount Fuji 2,060 times, including one year when he made 248 ascents, and another year when he made two ascents a day for 75 consecutive days. The previous record for the most ascents was 1,672 held by a mountain guide who climbed Mount Fuji in prewar times. In 2011, Jitsukawa received a special commendation from the President of the Japanese Alpine Club on the occasion of his superhuman feat of reaching the summit 1,111 times.

"It was after I quit working that I started climbing to the summit twice a day. Another climber was amazed to see that the elderly man he had seen at the top in the morning was climbing from the 5th station again in the afternoon," laughs Jitsukawa.

Jitsukawa's "twice a day" climb goes like this. He drives from his home to the 5th station and starts climbing at around 8 a.m. It takes him around three hours to complete the first ascent and around an hour and a half to descend to the 5th station, where he has a quick lunch of rice balls or bread before heading back to the summit. Jitsukawa completes the two round trips in nine hours, whereas most climbers take two days to make one round trip with an overnight stay. In 2008, just after his retirement, he set a record for the most ascents in a year with 248. At that time, the Japanese baseball player Ichiro,

who was active in the MLB (Major League Baseball) in the United States, was extending his record of consecutive 200-hit seasons and attracting a lot of media attention. Inspired by Ichiro's record-setting achievements, Jitsukawa challenged himself to climb to the summit of Mount Fuji more than 200 times a year, which he did for six years in a row.

Jitsukawa also challenged himself to conquer the Seven Summits of the world, while continuing to climb Mount Fuji and approaching the mountain from different start points, such as beginning the walk at Tokyo Station or at the southern tip of the Izu Peninsula, and completing it without sleeping or resting. He finally made his 2,000th ascent in June 2018 at the age of 74.

"I'm the type of person who becomes obsessed with something once I take a shine to it. Mount Fuji is the world to me now. No matter how many times I climb it, the mountain looks completely different each time," says Jitsukawa. The closure of Mount Fuji to hikers last year due to COVID-19 has meant his record of ascents remains at 2,060. Despite this, Jitsukawa remains in good spirits.

There are more than 340 mountains in all parts of Japan that in some way evoke Mount Fuji, each of them called by another name followed by "Fuji." Examples include Mount Yotei, known as "Ezo Fuji" or "Yezo Fuji," and Mount Rishiri, known as "Rishiri Fuji," both in Hokkaido. Many are relatively easy to climb, and Jitsukawa says he is now planning to travel around Japan where these "Fuji" mountains are located. "I'd like to take my time traveling across Japan enjoying the 'Mount Fujis' of each region," says Jitsukawa.

The shape of Mount Fuji resembles the kanji character *hachi* ("八"), meaning "eight." The Japanese regard the shape of this figure as "*sue-hirogari*," which literally means "spreading out like an unfolding fan" but has the meaning of "becoming prosperous." When people look at Mount Fuji, this auspicious association only increases their admiration for the beauty of the mountain. Jitsukawa, for so long fascinated by Mount Fuji, is no exception. 

Nakamura Yoshifumi (second right) with Dream Team Japan  
Photo: Courtesy of Nakamura Yoshifumi



Nakamura performs the L-sit on the rings  
Photo: Courtesy of TOKYO-SPORTS



# A Doctor and Gymnast for Life

**Nakamura Yoshifumi has been a surgeon and gymnast since he was 39. Now aged 82, his aim is to remain active in both of these roles for the rest of his life.**

## SUGIYAMA MAMORU

Nakamura  
the surgeon  
Photo: Courtesy of  
Nakamura Yoshifumi



**W**EARING his red and black gymnastics uniform, Nakamura Yoshifumi received a huge round of applause from the audience when he performed an L-sit in the rings event, raising his legs to horizontal and holding the position. Nakamura was performing at the 53rd All Japan Senior Masters Gymnastics Championships 2020, held in September. This was the 27th time for the Tokyo-based Nakamura to compete in the tournament since he

first participated in 1985. He is the oldest active amateur gymnast in Japan and broke his own record in 2020 as the All Japan tournament's oldest participant at the age of 81 years 8 months.

“When I perform well, the air in the hall becomes tense for a moment. That feels good,” Nakamura says cheerfully.

For this event, five members including the winners of the previous tournament by age category formed Dream Team Japan. Nakamura was one of them. A goodwill match had been planned with the German team, which he was looking forward to. However, due to COVID-19, the German team's visit to Japan was canceled and the friendly competition was

postponed.

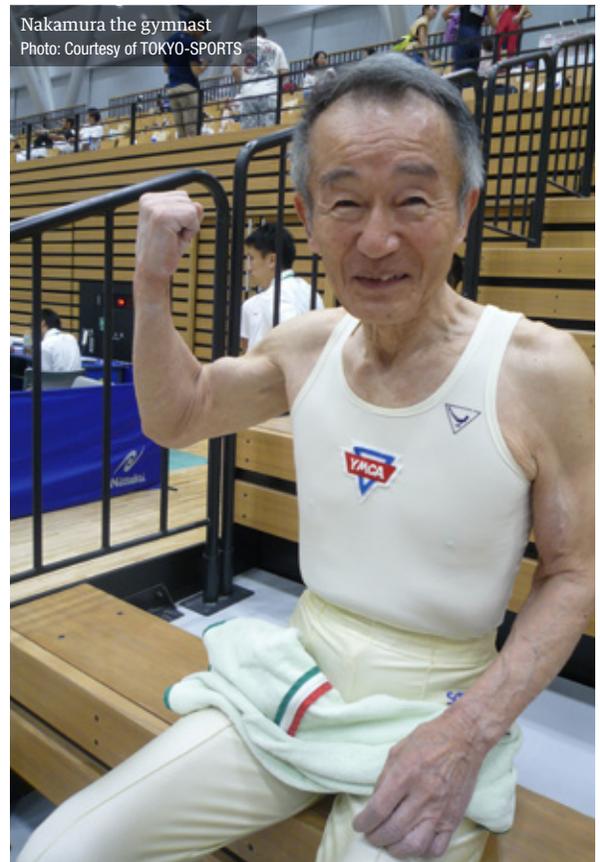
COVID-19 also affected Nakamura personally. In May, prior to the tournament, Nakamura became infected with COVID-19 during his work as the director of a hospital in Tokyo and had to be hospitalized for around three weeks, followed by two weeks of recuperation at home. While his symptoms were relatively mild, Nakamura felt very fatigued and lost muscle strength over those five weeks. After he recovered, he wanted to resume training right away. However, his usual gym was closed due to COVID-19, so he began by doing resistance band exercises at home, gradually moving his body again. The gym soon reopened, and he began serious muscle training, eventually managing to regain his strength. Somehow, he recovered in time to compete in the tournament in September, though at times he wondered if he would make it.

Looking back, Nakamura says, “I think I recovered faster after the illness because I’d set myself the goal of taking part in the competition no matter what.”

Nakamura took up gymnastics seriously in senior high school. For two consecutive years in his second and third year of high school, he participated in the National Sports Festival (the largest annual sports festival in Japan) representing his home prefecture of Shizuoka, going on to win the individual team combined title at the Shizuoka Prefectural Tournament in his third year. After that, he left gymnastics to study to become a doctor. He took up gymnastics again when the gymnastics club his children joined opened a class for adults. Nakamura was 39 years old.

“The real pleasure of gymnastics is overcoming fear through practice. When I can do something that I couldn’t do the day before, I can see the progress. And I always have the goal of competing in a tournament. That’s what’s kept me going until now,” says Nakamura.

Unlike team sports where athletes cannot practice for a competition alone, gymnastics is an individual sport. Nakamura stresses that the main reason why he is able to keep it up is that he can practice by himself at his own convenience, no matter how busy he is as an active surgeon and the director of a hospital



in Tokyo.

When Nakamura first returned to gymnastics, he put all his effort into making up for lost time after his senior high school days. Eventually, though, he had to deal with his aging body.

“It’s actually fun to squarely confront my aging body and challenge myself to take part in gymnastics competitions by training every day to ensure I maintain my performance level,” says Nakamura. Smiling, he goes on, “I hope many people who have done gymnastics when they were younger will see me still persevering at this age and join me in competing.” His motivation is evident: “Breaking records is all well and good, but I just want to continue gymnastics for as long as I can.”

Nakamura continues to train every day to achieve his aim of participating in the 2021 All Japan Senior Masters. 🏆

# The “Last Samurai” in Kyoto

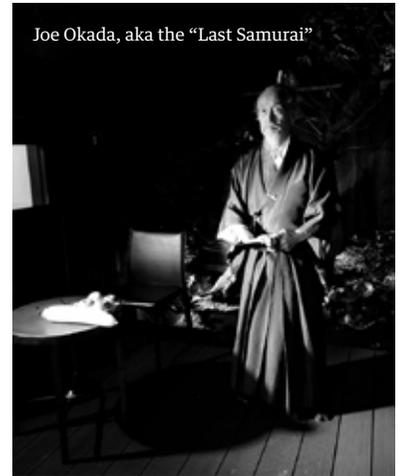
Joe Okada is the oldest National Government Licensed Guide Interpreter working in Japan and a popular character with foreign tourists.

YANAGISAWA MIHO

JOE Okada, who is 92 this year, works as a guide for foreigners in Kyoto and accompanies group tours to Hiroshima, Hakone and Tokyo. With his long hair tied in the topknot style, and dressed in *haori* and *hakama* (the formal jacket and trousers of traditional Japanese men’s clothing), his trademark look has earned him the nickname the “Last Samurai.” Okada shows foreign visitors around the city of Kyoto in fluent English peppered with a touch of humor. He has been a tour guide for 58 years.

Every Saturday until the

beginning of 2020, prior to the impact of COVID-19, Okada led trips to Kyoto Imperial Palace on his “Cool Kyoto Walking Tour.” The tour is popular among foreign tourists for its focus on cultural experiences unique to Kyoto while strolling through the city center. One such activity takes place in a store selling calligraphy tools, where tour participants are invited to use an ink brush to write their names using the katakana syllabary on Japanese writing paper called *hanshi*. In another activity, tourists are taken to a local shopping arcade known as



Joe Okada, aka the “Last Samurai”

the “common people’s kitchen,” where they have the opportunity to sample flavors enjoyed in regular Kyoto households. After a sampling session of tofu, a representative Kyoto food, Okada will throw in a topical comment or anecdote such as, “Kyoto tofu tastes really good, but did you know that the soybeans it’s made from are mostly imported from foreign countries such as the United States?”

When World War II ended, Okada was in junior high school.



Okada leads foreign tourists on a tour of Kyoto

All photos: Courtesy of Joe Okada

English had been considered “the language of the enemy,” so was not taught. Nevertheless, after graduating, Okada began driving cabs for the many foreigners who started to visit Japan, and learned English by noting down words he picked up from their conversations. During this time, an American businessman whom he had driven around for a week took a liking to him and offered him the chance to go to the United States, including financial support for his travel expenses. Once there, he spent around nine months working as his benefactor’s chauffeur during the day and attending a language school for foreigners held in a rented university classroom at night.

“I think I must be the least educated guide interpreter there is,” Okada laughs self-deprecatingly. But he studied hard, believing the chance that had been offered to him would lead to fortune.

When he returned to Japan, he sat the difficult National Government Licensed Guide Interpreter exam several times. Eventually, he passed and decided that this was his vocation.

Since then, Okada has hosted 1,700 “Samurai Japan Shows” in 13 years at Fushimi Momoyama Castle in Kyoto, attracting 130,000 visitors. The shows, aimed at foreign tourists, are held at the castle tower and feature demonstrations by masters of various Japanese cultural arts such as karate, ninja, tea (*chado/sado*), flower arrangement and kabuki. The “Home Visit Tour,” a tour of Japanese

private homes and farms, has also attracted 120,000 tourists over the past 20 years.

However, when COVID-19 spread around the world in 2020, the foreign tourists stopped coming.

Says Okada, “In 2020, work dried up almost completely

working for another four or five years yet.”

His vitality and comfort with computers and the Internet belie his age. Where does he get the power to keep going despite his 90-plus years?

“Well, if you lose your job you lose your income. Anyone in such



Okada demonstrates *kuchu ringo kiri* (cutting apples in the air), the “culmination of all *iaido* (sword drawing) training,” according to Okada.

because of COVID. But, you know, I’ve experienced similar situations before. The first time was in the 1990s, when the yen appreciated sharply and foreign customers suddenly stopped coming. The second time was in 2011 after the Great East Japan Earthquake. The situation this time, though, is unprecedented and worse than I experienced the previous two times. But I believe humanity will beat the coronavirus and that we can definitely get through this difficult period. I’m hoping to keep

a situation would think about what to do, then throw themselves into whatever it might be,” he laughs. “I don’t even have time to notice that I’m not as strong as I was or that my health is declining.”

When giving guided tours, there is one thing that Okada always keeps in mind: “Try to make things better than they are now.” Never be satisfied with the status quo, always think of others and get the greatest joy from making others happy. It is this spirit that keeps him forever young. 

# Measures to Address Japan's Aging Society

While the population of Japan is rapidly aging, the government of Japan is implementing various measures to create an “Age-free society in which people of all ages can make use of their motivation and abilities depending on their hope.”

## SAWAJI OSAMU

Since the end of the Second World War, Japan's average life expectancy has continued to increase, and Japan has become one of the leading nations in terms of long life expectancy. As of 2018, the average life expectancy was 81.25 years for men and 87.32 years for women. Life expectancy is expected to reach 84.95 years for men and 91.35 years for women by 2065. The percentage of people aged 65 and over (the percentage of the elderly) has also been increasing and is among the highest in the world. It was 28.4% in 2019 and is expected to reach 33.3% in 2036 and 38.4% in 2065.

To respond to the increasingly aging population in Japan, the Cabinet approved the “Guideline of Measures for Ageing Society” [hereafter, the Guideline] in February 2018. The Guideline lays down basic and comprehensive guidelines for public measures to address the aging society over the medium and long terms. Recognizing that older people are “getting younger in situation of physical age” and are “highly motivated to get involved in society,” the Guideline states, “The

general trend of determining over 65 as ‘Older People’ by their age is no longer realistic. The era has come that people even at 70 and older can demonstrate their ability based on their motivation and talent. Therefore, it will be necessary to develop a social environment in which motivated older people will be enabled to demonstrate their abilities, in conjunction with the idea to ‘support the older people.’”

The Guideline lists the following three basic ideas behind measures for the aging society:

- 1) Review standardization by age and aim at creating Age-free society in which people of all ages can make use of their motivation and abilities depending on their hope.
- 2) Develop a community life base and consolidate a local community where people can imagine their elderly life at any life stage.
- 3) Aim for new measures on aging society by using the innovation of technological achievements.

The Guideline then sets out medium-term guidelines for basic measures in six fields as follows (abbreviated):

- 1) **Employment and Income:** Develop an environment to real-

ize a society where all people can work regardless of their age; Stably operate a public pension system; Support asset formation

- 2) **Health and Welfare:** Comprehensively promote health; Sustainably operate the LTC (long-term care) insurance system; Enrich the LTC services (no one should be forced to leave their jobs for long-term care); Sustainably operate medical care system for older people; Promote measures to support older people with dementia; The way of medical care at the end of life; Promote establishment of framework for supporting local communities by mainly residents

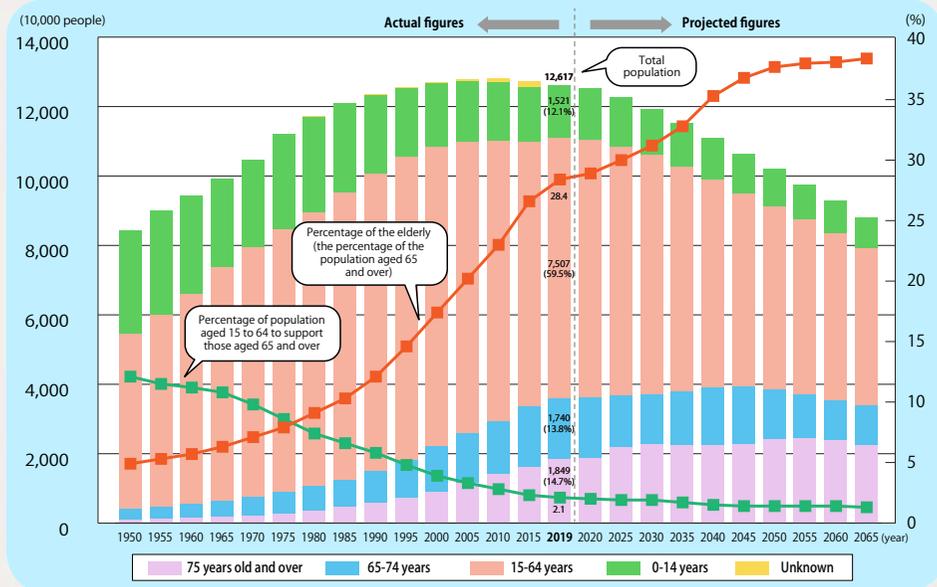
- 3) **Learning and Social Participation:** Promote learning activities; Promote social participation

- 4) **Living Environment:** Secure rich and stable housing life; Comprehensively promote town development for aging society; Ensure traffic safety and Protect from crime and natural disasters etc.; Promote the adult guardianship system

- 5) **Research Development and Contribution to the World:** Utilize advanced technology and activate the market for older people; Promote research and development, and infrastructure improvement; Share knowledge and challenges with foreign countries

- 6) **Promote Success of All Generations:** Promote initiatives to realize a society where people of all generations actively participate in the society by playing their respective role in the aging society

## Trends in Ageing Population and Projection for the Future



Source: Annual Report on the Ageing Society (FY 2020)

The government of Japan is implementing a variety of measures in each of the above fields.

Specifically, measures in the field of Employment and Income include the revision of laws, such as mandating employers to make efforts to secure employment up to the age of 70 and the provision of support to companies that hire older people or extend retirement age, to increase employment opportunities for older people.

Measures in the field of Health and Welfare include enhancement of nursing-care related services and human resource development, in order to build a system whereby local residents can receive LTC services in a continuous and integrated manner in their familiar area. In 2019, the Ministerial

Council on the Promotion of Policies for Dementia Care drafted its Framework for Promoting Dementia Care to delay the onset of dementia and develop a society in which dementia patients are able to spend their daily lives in hope.

Measures in the field of Living Environment include support for the creation of barrier-free residences, public transportation and public facilities to achieve an environment in which all people, including older people, are able to live and move freely without stress.

In the field of Research Development and Contribution to the World, Japan exchanged a Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of healthcare with the Republic of the Philippines, Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, Republic of Uganda,

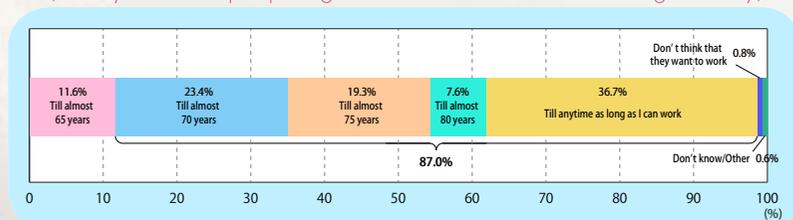
Republic of Senegal, United Republic of Tanzania, Republic of Ghana and Republic of Zambia in 2019. This memorandum is under Asia Health and Wellbeing Initiative and the Africa Health and Wellbeing Initiative which is promoted for the development of nursing-care related industries and human resources and the prevention of disease in Asia and Africa.

To establish the Age-free society stated in the basic principles of the “Guideline of Measures for Ageing Society,” the awareness of both companies and citizens is important, in addition to the government measures above. It is also necessary to create a variety of opportunities for mutual support and to expand the ways in which older people are able to actively support society through the promotion of social participation activities for older people regardless of employment form. This constitutes a major challenge for the future. ■

**Note:** This article has been created with the consent of the Cabinet Office and on the basis of materials published by the Cabinet Office.

### Until what age would you like to work with income?

(Survey results for people aged 60 and over who are working currently)



Source: Annual Report on the Ageing Society (FY 2020)



■ A bed equipped with the Nemuri SCAN sensor

# Sleep Scanning

A manufacturer of beds for medical treatment and nursing care has developed a sensor that can be attached to a bed to measure a person's sleep state. The device is contributing to the improvement of the sleep quality of residents in facilities for the elderly and reducing the burden on the staff at these facilities.

UMEZAWA AKIRA

Keeping watch during the night is a significant burden on staff working in facilities for aged people, such as nursing homes. They have to do rounds every couple of hours to prevent injuries from falls or other accidents that the elderly residents with dementia may experience when walking around or going to the bathroom at night. In some facilities, the physical and mental burden borne by staff is exacerbated by the fact that a single staff member must take care of everything from eight at night to seven the next morning.

Paramount Bed Co., Ltd., whose main products are beds for medical treatment and nursing care, sought to address these issues.

The company developed a system of checking for changes in the condition of people in bed, including sleeping, awakening, rising and getting out of bed, and measuring respiratory rates by assessing the movements of the person sleeping in a bed through a sheet-shaped sensor installed under the bed's mattress.

The Nemuri SCAN system (*nemuri* means sleep) enables the staff of care facilities to access the real-time condition of its resi-

dents 24 hours a day. If residents take any action, such as rising or getting out of bed, this information is transmitted to computers installed in the staff room and/or the staff's mobile devices. Staff can take the necessary measures without continually having to keep watch.

"Our achievements in the study of sleep states without placing stress on the person sleeping led to the creation of Nemuri SCAN," says Kumagai Koji from Paramount Bed's public relations department. "When devices such as sensors are attached to a person's body to measure sleep states,



■ The location where Nemuri SCAN sensors are installed

the device itself puts stress on the individual and prevents the measurement of natural sleep states. Therefore, we developed a system enabling us to ascertain the condition of a sleeping person objectively using a sheet-shaped sensor installed under the mattress.”

A sheet-shaped sensor capable of detecting the slight movements of a sleeping person and their respiration and heart rates was necessary to get a full picture of the person’s sleep state without attaching a device to the person. People involved in development brought prototype sensors home to measure their own sleep and recorded data almost every day. The proprietary high-precision sensor was developed based on that accumulated data.

Up to the end of September 2020, 55,000 Nemuri SCAN sensors have had been sold since its launch in 2009. Recently, the product has new features including the transmission of images captured by a camera attached to the bed to the staff’s mobile phones when a resident gets up.

Collecting accurate sleep data is

useful from the perspective of care program optimization. “For example, we take remedial steps such as increasing activities including light exercise during the day for persons who are not able to get enough sleep due to their waking up many times during the night. By doing so, we can provide them with better sleep,” says Kumagai.

The company entered a busi-

ness partnership with Somp Holdings, Inc. in May 2020, and installed the Nemuri SCAN in all of the operator’s approximately 18,000 rooms at nursing homes. It collects a range of data, including data about sleep, diet, medication and activities, subject to the consent of residents. By sharing the data that is gathered with academic institutions, medical organizations and private-sector companies, the system is intended to facilitate the improvement of nursing services, the early detection and treatment of dementia, as well as the development of supplements and exercise programs.

Kumagai says, “In addition to finding solutions to problems in the medical and nursing care fields, we hope to apply the data we have accumulated to provide a better quality of sleep for everyone.”



■ A visualization of patients’ heart rates, respiratory rates and states (sleeping, out of bed, etc.) is displayed in real time on the monitor



# Satoyama— Where People and Nature Meet

■ Kevin Short

American anthropologist and naturalist Kevin Short has spent much of his life in Japan sharing his fascination with *satoyama* through his writings, lectures and other activities.

SATO KUMIKO

There are many areas of Japan where the traditional countryside landscape, known as “*satoyama*,” or “*satochi*,” can still be found. According to the Ministry of the Environment, Japan, *satoyama* is “an area consisting of farmlands, irrigation ponds, secondary forest, plantation forest, and grasslands around human settlements.” It is often located between mountainous areas and urban areas, and the environment and landscape are maintained through human interventions.

US native Kevin Short writes, lectures and conducts research on

*satoyama*. Short first came to Japan in 1972. Back then, he was responsible for maintaining telecommunication systems at the US military base in Zama City, Kanagawa Prefecture. On his days off, he would travel within Japan, which led to an interest in the country’s nature, culture and history. Short took evening classes in Japanese at Sophia University, graduating in 1975. He went on to major in cultural anthropology at Stanford University, receiving his PhD in 1991. Until March 2020, he was a professor at Tokyo University of Information Sciences in Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture,

where he was engaged in research and teaching. Short is now retired and devotes himself to researching *satoyama* and other aspects of the relationships among people and the natural world in Japan. He is especially interested in the spiritual components of these relationships.

Short married and started a family in 1980. Since 1987 he has been living in Chiba New Town, a large residential area in northwest Chiba Prefecture between central Tokyo and Narita Airport. Prior to



■ Short with participants at a nature observation event



touch of Short’s illustrations shows his deep appreciation of Japanese nature and culture.

Short also guides nature hikes and observation classes at various satoyama spots in Chiba Prefecture. For example, one non-profit organization that sponsors these activities is Y. Y. NOWSON, set up in 2014 by groups researching local natural farming methods and locally produced food. This group works closely with the Tokyo University of Information Sciences to provide opportunities for learning about satoyama conservation and rural communities through hands-on experience. As well as continuing to write, lecture and run hands-on nature programs, Short hopes to start using social networking sites and other digital channels to disseminate his information more efficiently.

“I believe that the traditional Japanese satoyama, where people create a sustainable lifestyle by co-existing with nature, has significance and value on a global scale now that the world is facing serious environmental problems.” Says Short, “In the near future I also want to explore the roots of satoyama by delving into old Japanese myths and folk beliefs, and wander around the places where those stories are handed down.”

Kevin Short has devoted his life to understanding the unique relationships that the Japanese people have developed with their island world. He is passionate about cultural landscapes like the satoyama, and believes that people both in Japan and around the world have much to learn from this. 

the development of land for housing, the area was entirely rural, and the satoyama landscape of rice paddies, irrigation ponds and thickly wooded areas still remains today. It is the perfect environment for his research activities, and Short continues to conduct fieldwork here on the origins and present state of satoyama.

“The spiritual culture of the Japanese people has taken root in satoyama over a long period of time,” says Short. The Japanese folk spirituality is based on a strong belief that humans rely heavily on the gifts of nature. People have not taken these gifts for granted, always expressing their appreciation in prayers, ceremonies and festivals. For example, hunters used to chant messages of gratitude to the mountain deities whenever they were blessed with a deer, boar or bear. People everywhere in Japan have erected *chinjusha* shrines dedicated to the tutelary deity of their village or neighborhood. These shrines are often surrounded by a dense grove of native trees known as a *chinju no mori* (sacred shrine forest). These forests offer habitat to

various wildflowers and birds such as owls and woodpeckers. Today, these beautiful, lush forests with their abundance of towering evergreen broadleaved trees, bearing a close resemblance to the natural environment of the past, can still be found all over the country.

“Satoyama is a landscape created from the interaction among the original natural environment, people’s daily livelihood activities, and local ideas and values concerning humans’ role in the natural world,” says Short.

Over more than three decades, Short has been sharing his thoughts and observations about satoyama in a series of newspaper columns as well as in books such as *Kevin no satoyama shizen kansatsuki* (*A Naturalist in the Japanese Countryside*) and *Nature in Tokyo*, an English-language guide to plants and animals in and around Tokyo. Short’s stories and books are accompanied by many of the author’s own photographs and drawings depicting all aspects of the satoyama countryside landscape, including not only flora and fauna, but folk beliefs as well. The soft and warm



# Barley Shochu Island

On Iki Island (Iki-no-shima) in Nagasaki Prefecture, shochu has been made for around 500 years. It is made from malted rice and barley using Iki's pure, mineral-rich groundwater.

## SAWAJI OSAMU

Located off the northern coast of Kyushu in the Sea of Japan, Iki Island stretches 17 kilometers from north to south and 15 kilometers from east to west and is blessed with nature's bounty. It was a base of maritime trade in the Yayoi period (c. 10th century BCE to 3rd century CE). Although Iki Island is part of Nagasaki Prefecture, it can be reached in approximately 60 minutes by the quickest ferry from Hakata Port in neighboring Fukuoka Prefecture.

One of Iki Island's specialties is shochu, a distilled spirit. With its flat topography and the second

largest fertile plain in Nagasaki Prefecture, grains such as rice and barley have been cultivated extensively here since ancient times. Shochu making using of rice and barley began in the sixteenth century. At the time, barley was the staple food of the islanders and any that was not consumed was used to produce homemade shochu. This is the origin of the "Iki Shochu" made today.

Iki Shochu is thought to be the first shochu in Japan made from barley, based on records which remain, so Iki is regarded as the "birthplace of *mugi* (barley) shochu." "Iki" has been designated as



□ A field of barley on Iki Island

Photo: Courtesy of Iki Sake Brewers Cooperative

a geographical indication (GI) by the Japanese government along with two other spirits distilled in Kyushu, "Kuma" from Kumamoto Prefecture and "Satsuma" from Kagoshima Prefecture.

Today, there are seven distilleries on the island making Iki Shochu according to the traditional method. The main characteristic of Iki Shochu is that it is made from barley and malted rice,



1 2

whereas mugu shochu in other regions is made from barley and malted barley. The island's mineral-rich groundwater is another vital raw material.

Yamauchi Akito of the Iki Sake Brewers Cooperative says, "Traditionally, the ratio of ingredients in Iki Shochu is one-third rice malt and two-thirds barley. When matured at this ratio, Iki Shochu is characterized by the refreshing aroma of barley, the sweetness and depth of flavor of malted rice, and a clean taste derived from the water used to make it."

Although the distilleries all follow the same basic method of production, each distillery's shochu takes on its own unique taste and aroma owing to differences in the design of the stills, the material used for the storage vessels and the length of time the spirit is allowed to mature. Distilleries use a variety of storage vessels such as unglazed vats, oak barrels and metal tanks. The shochus may be aged in these from around one year to more than twenty years, so people can enjoy comparing the taste of the same year's shochu made in seven different distilleries.

Many locals prefer to drink Iki Shochu straight to enjoy the aroma of the barley and the sweetness of the malted rice, but drinking it on the rocks, *mizuwari* (with water) or *oyuwari* (with hot water), or mixed with a fruit juice in cocktails is also recommended.

The local cuisine of Iki Island further complements the flavor of Iki Shochu. Iki Island's specialties are seafood such as sea urchin, abalone and squid, and Iki Beef. Born and raised on the island, Iki Beef is highly regarded for its tenderness, though with only around 900 cattle shipped annually it is not readily available outside the island. Restaurants and lodging facilities on the island serve delicious food made with these locally

- 1 Making malted rice for Iki Shochu
- 2 People raising a toast at an event held on July 1, designated "Iki Shochu Day" by Iki City

Photo: Courtesy of Iki Sake Brewers Cooperative

grown ingredients.

Yamauchi says, "Iki Shochu goes perfectly with a local dish called *hikitoshi*, a hot pot dish with ingredients such as chicken, tofu, *somen* noodles, and vegetables simmered in a sweet and spicy sauce; as well as with fresh seafood, Iki Beef and *Ishu* (Iki Island) *dofu*, a slightly firmer type of *tofu*."

Nurtured by abundant nature and loved by the people on the island for 500 years, Iki Shochu enhances the charm of Iki Island as something to be savored. 7



Iki Island's hotpot dish *hikitoshi*



Katsumoto Port, a natural harbor on Iki Island  
© NPTA

■ Zuiryuji viewed across the garden of white sand

Photo: Courtesy of Toyama Tourism Organization

# A Masterpiece of Zen Temple Architecture

**Zuiryuji, located in Takaoka City, Toyama Prefecture, is a magnificent Buddhist temple compound with an ambience of tranquillity created by the neatly ordered layout of its buildings.**

## SASAKI TAKASHI

Constructed in 1663, Koukouzan Zuiryuji temple (hereafter Zuiryuji) in Takaoka City, Toyama Prefecture is considered a classic example of Zen-style temples of the Edo period (1603-1867). Three buildings in the temple compound are designated as national treasures: the Sanmon (main gate), Butsuden (Buddhist hall) and Hattou (Dharma hall).

Zuiryuji's most distinctive feature is the layout of the buildings in the temple compound, or *garan*. The four main buildings, the Soumon gate, the Sanmon gate, Butsuden and Hattou, are laid out in a straight line, and the arrangement is divided into

two spaces by the 18-meter-high Sanmon gate. From the Soumon gate to the Sanmon gate, a *kare-sansui* (dry landscape) garden of pure white sand creates a tranquil ambience, while beyond the Sanmon up to the Hattou, an expanse of green lawn creates a solemn space for prayer.

The prayer space that begins at the Sanmon is surrounded by a corridor that extends for some 300 meters, connecting the gate to the Hattou in the innermost sanctum. Between the Hattou and the Sanmon stands the Butsuden, which enshrines a statue of the principal image, Shakyamuni Buddha. The symmetrical arrangement of the Soudou (meditation hall) on the left side (southern side) of the corridor and the Ooguri (kitchen) on

the right side is characteristic of the Zen architectural style.

Zuiryuji is a *bodaiji* (family temple), built over a period of twenty years in the mid-seventeenth century by Maeda Toshitane (1593-1658), third lord of the Kaga domain, as a memorial to his elder brother Maeda Toshinaga (1562-1614), the second lord. Its construction was overseen by Yamagami Zenemon Yoshihiro, the clan's head carpenter, who



■ Interior of the Hattou (Dharma hall)

Photo: Courtesy of Zuiryuji

was hailed as a master builder. The Butsuden, said to have been Yamagami's major focus, houses statues of Shakyamuni Buddha, Samantabhadra and Manjushri. The Butsuden is supported at each side by two parallel 13-meter-high, 600-year-old zelkova pillars. This structure allows visitors to enjoy the intricate and elaborate roof ornamentation on the high ceiling, as well as creating a space where the chanting of sutras and the sound of bells resonate together. Another feature of the Butsuden is its lead roof, three millimeters thick and weighing 47 tons. This is said to have been conceived as a resource for making bullets for guns should war ever break out.



■ Hattou (Dharma hall)  
Photo: Courtesy of Toyama Tourism Organization

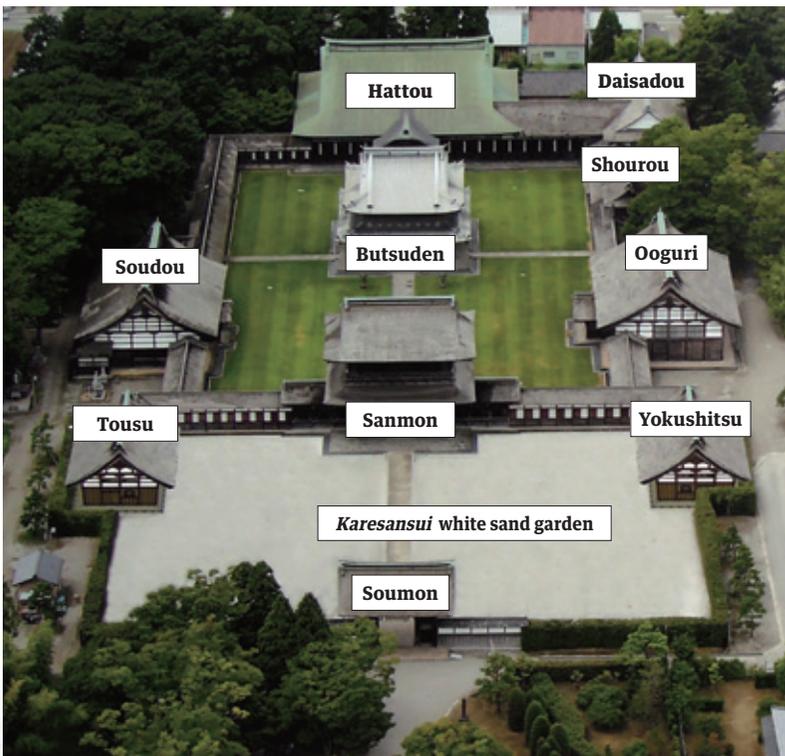
“The cost of building Zuiryuji is said to have been so great that it strained the finances of the Kaga Clan. It is testament to the strong respect Toshitsune had for Toshinaga,” says Yotsuya Doukou, head priest of Zuiryuji.

Toshinaga was the founder of

Takaoka. In 1609, he built a castle in the wilderness of the Sekino plateau and named the town which grew up around it Takaoka. Toshinaga laid the foundation for commerce and industry in Takaoka. An example is his promotion of the casting industry, which led to casting becoming the local industry of Takaoka. Today, “Takaoka copperware” continues to be known throughout Japan. Interestingly, the roof of the Hattou at Zuiryuji, made from *hinoki* cypress wood, is in fact thatched with copper. In the center is enshrined an enormous memorial tablet of Toshinaga.

Yotsuya says, “The temple not only displays the aesthetic sense and financial power of the Kaga clan, but also expresses respect for Toshinaga and the feelings of the Maeda family.”

The aura of solemnity created by the orderly layout of the buildings, the simplicity and strength of the Zen architectural style, and the beauty of the details make even non-Buddhists want to quietly surrender themselves to the temple that is Zuiryuji. 



■ Photo: tsuyo / PIXTA

JAPAN  
HERITAGE

Oita  
Prefecture

Photo: Courtesy of Rokugo Manzan Japan Heritage Promotion Council

## The Kunisaki Peninsula —Where Ogres Bring Happiness (Oita Pref.)



JAPAN HERITAGE

**T**he Kunisaki Peninsula in the northeastern part of Oita Prefecture is a land of steep mountains and ancient traditions. Its name, recorded in the earliest histories of Japan, literally means the “far end of the country.” For centuries, locals have thought these mountains to be inhabited by ogres.

While people in other parts of Japan tend to consider ogres bearers of ill-fortune, in Kunisaki they believe ogres bring happiness. This is symbolized by festivals known as Shujo Onie, held every January of the lunar calendar in various parts of the peninsula. Ogres bear wooden torches said to contain the power of Buddhism and brandish them at participants, granting them health and good harvests. Other ogres travel round the villages, where they are invited into homes and served with food and sake.

The strangely shaped cliffs, some with Buddha figures carved into the rock, rugged peaks and caves of the Kunisaki area make it little wonder why the people of Kunisaki believed ogres resided in these mysterious mountains.

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